

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC FAMILY SYSTEM IN THE MODERN WORLD

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Abstract

Family is the basic unit which builds and transforms the society. In the modern world, the family system is breaking down and the humanistic values have been replaced by greed and selfishness. Now, the situation of the family resembles to the nest of a bird where it cares and feeds its young ones till they are able to fly and live freely. Thus practically, this basic element of society has been fractured. This situation has turned into a challenge for the intellectuals of east and west. While on the other hand, the Islamic family system has the ability to pacify this problem as it is based on the principles derived from nature. The real Islamic family system, based on Qur'an and Sunnah and not that practiced by semi-educated Muslims, assumed to be the most appropriate system for humanity. This paper contributes to the salient features of Islamic family system, with special reference to some burning issues of modern family structure such as its break down, births out of wedlock, higher divorce rate and old & senior citizens. The paper aims to prove being the demand of the beneficial interfaith harmony and dialogue, the international community and the intelligentsia should appreciate good guidelines without any discrimination.

Introduction:

Family lays the foundation of a nation and shapes the destiny of the coming generations. It provides a safer place for young, so they can be brought up, educated, trained and civilized. The family provides reinforcement to the society in the shape of adding new members. The role of family is of great importance in every society because it is the basis and structure of the society itself. Development and modernization changed the world into a global village and affected each and every aspect of life. The family system has been undermined and

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shaken due to recent global challenges.

While discussing from Islamic point of view, human being is denoted by "*Insān*" in Arabic which is derived from "*Uns*" and it stands for love and affection.¹ The human likes to live in a gathering being social and affectionate to others. Deviation from socialization, love and nature has been described as animalism, even worse than that. The noble Qur'an describes this as "*They have hearts wherewith they understand not, they have eyes where with they see not, and they have ears where with they hear not (the truth). They are like cattle, nay even more astray; those! They are the heedless ones*".² As the result of this love, affection and tendency for being social, the humans like cohabitation and living together. The family is the prime unit of cohabitation and living together.

In the history of mankind, various societies and social systems had evolved specific norms, customs and principles for their family systems with the passage of time. Each and every social system claimed to have a family system which was perfect and best of all as per their specific thoughts under the influence of creed and doctrines. Qur'an highlights this as: "*Of those who split up their religion, and became sects, [i.e. they invented new things in the religion (Bid'ah), and followed their vain desires], each sect rejoicing in that which is with it*".³

However, the glorious Qur'an describes the decision of Almighty Allah as the fittest will survive in the struggle of existence. The noble Qur'an narrates: "*He sends down water (rain) from the sky, and the valleys flow according to their measure, but the flood bears away the foam that mounts up to the surface, and (also) from that (ore) which they heat in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, rises a foam like unto it, thus does Allah (by parables) show forth truth and falsehood. Then, as for the foam it passes away as scum upon the banks, while that which is for the good of mankind remains in the earth. Thus Allah sets forth parables (for the truth and falsehood, i.e. Belief and disbelief)*".⁴ It evidently expresses that whatever will be beneficial for mankind will exist and other than that will fade away definitely apart from its expensiveness and beauty in the past. It proved that Qur'an presented the principle of "Survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence" more than fourteen hundred years ago.⁵

Islam terms itself equal to the nature of mankind and universe. The noble Qur'an describes: *"Then set your face upright for religion in the right state-- the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion, but most people do not know"*.⁶

Although, it is regretfully admitted that mal-practices of some Muslims in this respect are questioned from few angles, however, it deems important that the real Islamic family system, as per commandments of Qur'an & Sunnah be presented to soothe the grievances of the humanity. The responsibility of Islamic scholars is of great importance in this regard as the glorious Qur'an is termed as *"Guidance to the whole humanity"*⁷ and the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) termed all creatures as the family of Allah⁸. Similarly, he (SAW) described the best human as the one who loves and serves the humanity.⁹

Focusing on the issue under subject, it is expedient to bring forth the salient features of Islamic family system to show ray of hope in the state of despair;

Preservation of humanity in the shape of procreation:

The main objective of marriage in Islam is preservation of the human life on the planet in the shape of procreation; therefore, it is not only a worldly need but also, it is a kind of worship. The Almighty Allah says to His slaves in this respect: *"And Allah has made for you spouses of your own kind, and has made for you, from your spouses, sons and grandsons, and has bestowed on you good provision"*.¹⁰

Chastity:

Cleanliness and purification, from inner and outer angles, are emphasized in Islam and regarded as a great virtue of a man and woman. Prophet of Islam (SAW) had said in this reference: *"O' Young men! Whoever has sufficient means should get married. It would help him to lower his gaze and protect his chastity"*.¹¹

Mutual Provision of Tranquility, Pleasure, Peace, Love and Affection:

Islam regards marriage as a source of pleasure and satisfaction in addition to its other advantages. The Qur'an expresses as: *"He created*

*for you partners from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect".*¹²

Equality:

Islam fundamentally believes in equality of all humans and same is the case between husband and wife where obligations and rights of both parties are pre-determined and well balanced as the single term “*zawj*” has been used for husband and wife in Arabic which denotes equality in both of them.¹³

Discipline:

Islamic family system is a well-disciplined system with proper monitoring and control of the dependents. Family head or seniors are not only responsible for feeding or clothing the dependents but for training also. The glorious Qur'an directs the Muslims in this regard: "*O you who believe! Ward off from yourselves and your families a Fire (Hell)*".¹⁴

Flexible Divorce Process:

Although Islam discourages separation and divorce, and all possible preventive measures are taken before tying the knot, however, exceptionally, it may occur between humans as difference is the natural phenomenon of the planet. In this regard, Islamic teachings are very careful, prudent and cautious. Both parties, especially husband, is directed to proceed very heedfully towards separation availing every possible mean of patch up.¹⁵ The divorce procedure in this system is based on various stages, providing opportunities for reconciliation and settlement, also. As a matter of nature, difference may occur anywhere, and Islam takes precautionary steps for avoiding such unpleasant incidents by introduction of pre-marriage stages such as consultation and consent of guardian and *kafā'ah* (equality in status, family, education, profession etc.). Even then, if such case appears between wife and husband, they are directed to refer to reconciliation committee consisting of judicious (*Hakam*) elders belonging to the families of both parties.

The Noble Qur'an directs about divorce procedure as: "*And if you fear disagreement between the two, send an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people. If they both desire reconciliation, Allah will cause it*

*between them. Indeed, Allah ever knowing and acquainted”.*¹⁶ If reconciliation committee fails to patch up then the process of divorce will start which is consisted upon three degrees in itself. At first degree, one revocable divorce is pronounced followed by month probation period i.e. one menstruation, providing the opportunity of patch up if desired by concerned parties. In case the differences continue, the probation period can be prolonged up to three months i.e. three menstruations. This will set free the wife from the marriage contract and she will have a choice to marry as per her desire with any one including her previous husband. At the second degree, the husband pronounces second divorce which is revocable, too. After the completion of probationary period i.e. three menstrual cycles she gets free from contract of marriage as discussed above. At the third degree, which is the severe one, the husband pronounce third divorce which irrevocable and the wife can marry any other man excluding former husband. The holy Qur'an highlights this as: *“The divorce is twice, after that, either you retain her on reasonable terms or release her with kindness”.*¹⁷ In this verse, number of divorce is described as two because up to two divorces are revocable but when third divorce occurs, it becomes irrevocable and the husband cannot remarry this lady.

Mutual Harmony & Understanding:

Understanding & agreement between husband and wife is of utmost importance to make their marital life pleasant and joyful. The Islamic family system cares for *kafā'ah* in order to bring harmony and unity in their relations. The objective of this feature is to bring similar individuals nearer to each other as people with dissimilarities do not tend to live together in most cases of human history. Qur'an says *"They are libās [i.e. body cover, or screen] for you and you are the same for them."*¹⁸

In the above mentioned verse, mutual relationship between husband and wife is highlighted in a befitting manner as wives are described like dress (*libās*) for husbands and vice versa. The selection of the Arabic term "*libās*" i.e. dress or cover is very meaningful, because the dress covers the shortfalls of the body and improves the beauty of it. Similarly, it saves from the impacts of extreme hot or cold weather. An ideal wife is a source of satisfaction for husband in the same manner the

husband is for her. It grants equal status to both parties of marriage as each of them is necessary for other. This balanced division of duties and privileges makes Islamic family the most peaceful entity of the planet, which can serve as a model for the whole world. This is the actual picture of highest level of confidence between wife and husband as well as sacredness of this relation, which Islam presents.

Durability:

The Islamic religion cares for the *Wilayah*¹⁹ or guardianship for ensuring permanence and longevity in the bond of marriage through indulgence of seniors in this most important decision of life which may affect future of coming generations. The parents are the most favorable people of a man or woman in the world and hardly one can think about any un-pleasant thing which they may desire for their children. Their practical life experiences should not be ignored rather utilized to get benefit from them.

In case of a girl, who opts free choice, the situation turns more serious when the couple separates and the girl comes back to her parental home after a bitter experience because the life is not so easy as it looks from outside. The situation would better if proper consultation were made with parents or guardian before going to make this gorgeous decision. Moreover, the said feature adds honor to the respective guardians of marriage parties rather than putting a restriction on freedom of choice on them. Another advantage of this feature is announcement of marriage which is a desirable deed in Islamic teachings and Islam stresses the pronouncement of marriage and it will be very strange that guardian remain unaware about the marriage of his children.²⁰

Discussion

The world might be divided on religious and non-religious grounds. The religious nations might be bifurcated into Semitic and non-Semitic religions. Semitic religions could be further divided into Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The religion of Islam considers the fountain head of all fore mentioned religions as one God i.e. Al-Mighty Allah is agreed upon unanimously. Basically, their teachings are same; however, the alterations in the religious instructions have been done by

the people afterwards. The holy Qur'an describes in this regard as: "*Mankind was one community*".²¹ Prophet Muhammad (SAW) says: All humanity is the family of God without any discrimination of caste, color, tribe or nation.²²

The present age is the age of rationality and justification, thus it is needed to explain Islamic teachings in the light of rationale to provide a chance to the world for benefitting from it experienced in the past in the case of Omer's law, which was adopted by the West in the field of social security and still known as Omer's law.

In Islam, also each family constitutes with the beginning of cohabitation of man and woman with the formal marriage agreement which is called *nikāḥ* in Islam (a solemn agreement between man and woman). Marriage is not only considered to pacify one sexually, but it occupies great importance in the formation of family and society. The family being the elementary stage of socialization is facing serious obstacles nowadays in the modern world creating panic among the concerned quarters. In the following, some important issues of family system of contemporary world are discussed in Islamic perspective:

Breakdown of the Family System:

Researchers fear that the traditional family system which was contributing largely in socialization of society will no longer be available. Britain has started pondering over the problem of family breaking down and it has been reported; "The Tories are proposing tax breaks for married couples which would allow women who stay at home on their allowance to their husband".²³

Dr. Katherine Rake, Chief Executive of Family & Parenting Institute, United Kingdom says; "Rising divorce rates, fewer marriages and the growth of civil partnerships mean that the traditional family model is no longer the norm and Government efforts to rescue it are futile. There will be no such thing as a typical family in the next 10 to 20 years".²⁴ Men and women both work outside homes while totally vacating the homes. Resultantly, social, cultural, emotional and psychological gap is produced between husband-wife and parents-children. The breakdown of family is the start of the fall of whole social

system, which cannot be bore for a long time by any nation. This condition prevails almost in every developed country where people are ignoring marriages and out of marriage birth rate is increasing. The Japan has the highest life expectancy but almost zero population growth. In 2010, Japan reduced by 123,000 people, losing population. The year 2010 showed 706,000 recorded marriages, lowest in the history of Japan since 1954. On the other hand, unwed pregnancies increased in significant number. Fewer marriages mean that fewer children will bear in future.²⁵

The situation has alarmingly changed for countries where birth rate is lower, marriages are fewer and couples do not like to have children. Presently, they are facing the problem of young work force and even disappearance of their species from the earth in the future.

The welfare of humanity seems to be lying in adopting family life. The humans are living in families and collectively since long ago. The family life makes a man or woman responsible, sensible and dutiful with respect to his or her various roles in the society as well as in family. The family provides protection, shelter and elementary education to the new off spring, while devastation of family encircles the mal-education of new generations. The family life arise the sense of sympathy for humans, kindness of elders and love to Youngers. Similarly, the man who lives out of family deprives himself from all these humanistic values. Islam presses the adoption of familial life instead of bachelor one and promises rewards for the efforts which a man carries out in struggling for maintenance of his family. The money, a man spends on his family, is also a type of charity in Islam even a better type of charity than other.

Births out of Wedlock:

Apart from the right of the abortion to females, birth rate out wedlock is increasing. In a study conducted by the National Marriage Project and the Institute for American Values recently in United States revealed that 44% percent out of 60% from those Americans who had completed school education were born out of wedlock. Amazingly, this figure was 13% in 1980. Study illustrated that kids born or raised

up outside of wedlock are more likely to suffer from assortment of communal and sensitive complications.²⁶

According to another study conducted in England, “The proportion of births outside marriage as compared to the total proportion of births has been increasing steadily throughout the 1990s from 30.2 percent of all live births in 1991 to 40 per cent in 2001. The rise in births outside marriage in a period, when, as a result of contraception, it is possible to have virtual total control over fertility, is perhaps surprising”.²⁷

The condition of family in Germany is not satisfactory also as a study reveals; “throughout the last decades, a clear trend away from the extended families can be observed. Families now tend to be smaller than before. This can be easily demonstrated by examining the birth rate in Germany, which has greatly declined since the beginning of 20th century. This trend is likely to continue for another few decades at least, further decreasing Germany’s population. More than 20% of households in Germany’s metropolitan areas are a so- called single household, which means they consist of only one person. This is probably the key result of a highly individualistic society, but it might also be a sign for a lack of social communication. After all, according to newer surveys, 80% of these single households are so unwillingly.”²⁸

As per Islamic instructions, births out of wedlock or even sexual relations out of wedlock are prohibited. Islam cares for inner and outer purification as well as hygiene, thus, it prohibits all acts which can lead to impurity or contamination. In the Islamic teachings, it can be suggested that out of wedlock birth should not be allowed in the best interest of humanity, especially, in same-sex marriages. Proper Education drive should aware public about the construction and maintenance of family in order to provide a safe home to our children and a safe world to our coming generations.

Higher Divorce Rate:

Divorce is increasing rapidly in Europe making the family life more miserable. United States has the highest divorce rate of 4.95% per 1000 of population. Britain has 3.08 divorces per 1000 of population and largest proportion of lone parents in Europe. Italy had the lowest

rate at 0.27 divorces, while Spain registered 0.9, France 2.0, Austria 2.2, and Finland 1.85.²⁹

The study of the National Marriage Project in 1999 at Rutgers University United States of America found that: "The marriage rate among Americans is at its lowest point ever. Over the last 40 years, the rate has fallen 43 percent. In addition, fewer people are reporting themselves as being very happy".³⁰

According to Islamic teachings, no one is perfect and flawless in this world. So, husband-wife relation should be based on real grounds rather than ideological ones. As per Islamic instructions, one should not leave anything on the basis of hatred or dislike because it may have some benefits inside it, the holy Qur'an says in this reference: "*perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good for you*".³¹ Hence, Islam selects every possible mean to avoid divorce and separation between the couple and divorce is termed as the most un-liked permissible act.³² As a natural instinct of humans, sometimes couples feel difficulties in bringing mutual understanding or even face failure of marriage. In such cases Islamic teaching should be taken care in resolving the situation. This can be done through reconciliation committee of family elders, then by reconciliation council at larger level or Counselor and, lastly, divorce should be attained in revocable way having the opportunity of patch up in future. This can be more comprehended by the study of the contents mentioned in introduction of this paper under the sub-title of flexible divorce process.

Old and Senior Citizens:

As a proverb it is said commonly "old is gold" but practical experiences, in family system, show contrary to this phenomenon as senior citizens living in some modern countries do not have the opportunity to be cared of by their wards in the old age due to busy and expensive life style of present age, therefore many of them take shelter at old homes, built specially for them where living is not less than a psychological issue for most of them. Studies show that old people living alone or in isolation are more likely exposed to mental and psychological problems than others such as depression, anxiety,

alcohol-abuse and drug-addiction.³³

Islam provides due honor and respect to elder and senior citizens and binds upon their dependents to look after and maintain them. The religion of Islam incites to honor and take care of seniors as the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) says:

“Who does not know the right of seniors amongst us and does not feel pity on Youngers is not from our community”.³⁴

The elders of family are holder of values, culture, rites and customs of family history and transmit it to the coming generation from chest to chest. Sociologically, their role is interesting and important in family to disseminate cultural wake up in new comers. The elders have a great variety of practical experiences and knowledge which can be exploited. Naturally, in old age people feel like Youngers once again retiring from practical life. As per Islamic teachings, seniors should be resided in the family with optimum respect enabling them to spend most of their time with children and transfer the family values. New generation needs consultation and guidance from the seniors in the light of their practical experiences of life rather than storing them in a warehouse away from family. Hence, the family traditions and humanistic values will remain live in the world and new comers will learn from their seniors to keep up with them.

Homosexuality:

This is the serious emerging problem which is being faced in modern world nowadays getting the position of hot cake between supporters and deniers. From Islamic perspective, the sole purpose of the marriage is the preservation of procreation of human being and protection of chastity for both man & woman. If gay-marriage gets popularity in the world, then young work force will be lessened and result will be non-favorable for humanity. These marriages also deprive the opposite sex to get involve in a natural sexual activity. In many developed and civilized countries same-sex marriages got legality through the accent of respective parliaments and being practiced freely.³⁵ As a fact, it could not be denied that each human has potential longing for having baby which could not be fulfilled in same-sex

marriages but through artificial means in females and through adoption in both. The case of adoption in gay's marriages has got a form of hot debate in France after the announcement of government of its plan to authorize adoption for gays married couples, which is strongly opposed by Roman Catholic Church and right-wing parties.³⁶

From the medical point of view, same-sex marriages have various prospective health hazards. Both gays and lesbians are at the high risk of sexually transmitted diseases and they possess a great chance of suffering from psychiatric and mental illness than heterosexual couples. Similarly, they are more likely for addicting to tobacco, alcohol, narcotics and illicit drugs. Homosexual motion rests a chief cause of communication of the HIV/AIDS infection.³⁷ The most shocking revelation is the lessening of life expectancy in gays, which is reportedly lessened up to 20 years.³⁸

Apart from the continuous education drive, the communicative diseases are on the rise and reached to an alarming level. Some homosexuals have quit the homosexual life and joined heterosexual life describing their previous experiences as very bad. The *Journal of the American Public Health Association* carried a front cover story of a homosexual gay with the following caption: "I gave my lover everything including HIV. I didn't mean to. We made a mistake. May be deep down we felt it would be better if we both had it".³⁹

Conclusion

Family system is of utmost importance in the human life. Presently, family is facing serious threats endangering its existence in the world. Stern and durable steps are needed to cope with this situation. Nowadays the world is a global town and good ideas as well as experiences of others are being availed for the well-being of humanity. The sagaciousness lies in the adoption of a better choice for the prosperity of humanity without the exception of religion, nation or caste. What is needed is to understand Islam from its basic sources i.e. Qur'an & Sunnah and to present it before the world, rationally, as the Islamic teachings are closely linked with human nature. If the Muslim scholars get succeeded in presenting the real Islamic teachings

regarding family system, as per instructions of Qur'an & Sunnah, it will be a great service to humanity by them. Such as the United Kingdom selected the social security system of Islam known as Omer's law, which is referred to the second caliph Islam Hazrat Omer's introduced social security system. Being the demand of the beneficial interfaith harmony and dialogue, the international community and the intelligentsia should appreciate good instruction without the discrimination of religion, caste, nation or tribe.

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- ³ Al-Qur'an, Al-Room 30: 32
- ⁴ Al-Qur'an, Al-R'ad 13:17
- ⁵ Al-Azhari, 1995
- ⁶ Al-Qur'an, Al-Room 30:30
- ⁷ Al-Qur'an, Al-Baqarah 02:185
- ⁸ Bayhaqi, Hadith No. 6944
- ⁹ Bayhaqi, Hadith No.7142
- ¹⁰ Al-Qur'an, Al-Nahl 16:72
- ¹¹ Al-Qushayri, Hadith No;2493
- ¹² Al-Qur'an Al-Room 30:21
- ¹³ Zayyat, 2006, p.405
- ¹⁴ Al-Qur'an, Tahreem 66:06
- ¹⁵ Al-Qur'an, Al-Nisa 04:34&35
- ¹⁶ Al-Qur'an, Al-Nisa 4:35
- ¹⁷ Al-Qur'an, Al-Baqarah 02: 229
- ¹⁸ Al-Qur'an, Al-Baqarah 02:187
- ¹⁹ Tirmizi, 2007
- ²⁰ Waliullah, 1998
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- ²² Baihaqi, Al-Kitab Shab ul Imaan
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- ²⁵ Inglish, 2012
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- ²⁹ People Statistics, 2012
- ³⁰ Faqs, 1999
- ³¹ Al-Qur'an, Al-Nisa 04:19
- ³² Sajistani, 2004
- ³³ Older People, 2012
- ³⁴ Hanbal, 2000
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